

ORNITHOLOGICAL LITERATURE

THE BIRDS OF THE PALEARCTIC FAUNA. Passeriformes. By Charles Vaurie. H. F. & G. Witherby, London, 1959: 10¼ × 7¼ in., xii + 762 pp. \$16.00.

There are two principal ways of going about the preparation of a check-list for any major geographic area. It may be done by a committee, usually composed of members appointed by the pertinent scientific organization, sometimes of individuals with a common interest in the region in question. Among bird lists, these two variations of the first approach are exemplified by the A.O.U. and B.O.U. Check-lists, and the "Check-list of the Birds of Mexico," respectively. The second method is that of single authorship, in which one man takes on the job, soliciting help and advice from his colleagues as required, but unhampered by any committee structure. Examples of this approach include the well-known works on Africa by Selater, Australasia by Mathews, the West Indies by Bond, Colombia by de Schauensee, the first seven volumes of the Peters "Check-list of Birds of the World," and numerous others.

The publication of the first volume of Dr. Vaurie's important work on Palearctic birds helps to confirm the opinion, held by many, that the single-author approach is the preferable method of producing a major check-list. Speed of publication is one important factor; the first paper in Vaurie's preliminary series of "Systematic Notes" appeared in December, 1953, and he was reading page-proofs of the present volume less than five years later. This contrasts with the 18 years that elapsed between the formation of a committee to prepare a fifth edition of the A.O.U. Check-list and the actual publication of that volume. It is acknowledged that the comparison is not wholly a fair one; the 18-year span included the period of World War II, and throughout the entire time most of the committee members could devote only a relatively small proportion of their working hours to the Check-list. It is true, too, that Vaurie's volume includes only the Passeriformes, but the scope of the information included in his check-list substantially exceeds that in the A.O.U. list. These statements must not be construed as criticisms of the individual members of the A.O.U. Check-list Committee, nor as a suggestion that a single author prepare the sixth edition of the A.O.U. list. The comparison is made primarily to indicate the magnitude of the task Vaurie has accomplished (he is well underway in the writing of the second volume).

The somewhat pedantic title of Vaurie's work was undoubtedly chosen to acknowledge its relationship to Hartert's classical "Die Vögel der Paläarktischen Fauna" (1903-1922). Vaurie has chosen, quite rightly, not to duplicate much of the substance of Hartert's work (keys, detailed descriptions, complete synonymies) in the new book. On the other hand, information presented for each species far exceeds that in most check-lists. Post-Hartert synonymies, together with references to major revisions and monographs, are given, but detailed systematic discussions (frequent in Hartert) were published separately in Vaurie's preliminary series of 33 "Systematic Notes on Palearctic Birds"; the working systematist should have this series bound as a companion volume to the check-list itself.

The geographic range is given for both the species as a whole and for each subspecies, as in the A.O.U. Check-list; there is also a list of extra-limital subspecies. A useful addition to the statement of species range is a brief description of preferred habitat. English vernacular names are supplied for all species, and French and German names for species occurring in countries using those languages. Since all of these are separately indexed, there are thus *four* indices: for English, French, German, and scientific names.

One of the chief characteristics of the single-author check-list, as opposed to the committee or A.O.U. type, is its uniformity of viewpoint. The responsibility for all taxonomic

decisions is the author's, unless otherwise stated. This fact can be helpful to later workers who may wish to discuss or dispute a point with the author; in the case of the A.O.U. Check-list, it is virtually impossible to determine how and by whom any given taxonomic decision was made. The uniformity of viewpoint of the single-author check-list *can* be something of a shortcoming if the author happens to be an extremist of either the "lumping" or the "splitting" schools. In lists published by lumpers, the reader usually has no way of knowing whether subspecific names have been synonymized by the author on objective (i.e., nomenclatorial) or subjective (i.e., taxonomic) grounds. Vaurie, who tends to be somewhat of a lumper at the subspecies level, has overcome this difficulty in an ingenious way. First, for many polytypic species he has included a general paragraph on geographical variation, pointing out the nature of the important trends of variation within the species as a whole. Each subspecies which is considered to be well differentiated takes its place in the list without further comment. Moderately-well differentiated subspecies also have regular positions on the list, but are prefixed by the symbol (o). In the synonymies, those names regarded as absolute synonyms appear without comment, while those names which have been given to populations considered by Vaurie to be insufficiently differentiated to be worthy of nomenclatorial recognition are prefixed with an asterisk, and a comment on their status (usually stages on a cline) often appended. This system will undoubtedly represent a genuinely helpful tool to workers who may wish to re-evaluate Vaurie's treatment of a given species.

I do not propose to comment on Vaurie's taxonomic treatment of any particular group of birds. No specialist will read this (or any other) check-list without finding some occasion to differ with the author. My own studies, for instance, have led me to conclusions differing from Vaurie's in (among others) *Hirundo daurica* and *Passer montanus*. Such differences of opinion are inevitable among taxonomists, and certainly do not affect the usefulness and importance of Vaurie's book.

One of the major contributions of the present check-list lies in its detailed and up-to-date treatment of the distribution of the birds of the eastern portion of the Palearctic region, an area whose very geography (much less its avifauna) is unknown to most westerners. Vaurie has had the benefit of extensive correspondence with Russian ornithologists, and has been able to avail himself of literature and specimens seen by few, if any, other western workers. An excellent gazetteer and two sketch maps (Turkestan and western China) are invaluable aids to the understanding of Asian distribution patterns. Even more maps would have been a great convenience, but the latitudes and longitudes given in the gazetteer will enable the reader to locate most places on National Geographic or other readily available maps.

In view of the substantial number of species appearing on both lists, differences between the treatment of the A.O.U. Check-list and that of Vaurie's book will be of interest to American readers. These differences are relatively few, and concern mostly species accidental in North America (the non-passerine volume will naturally include a much larger number of holarctic species). Among the birds other than these accidentals, the following departures from A.O.U. usage were noted:

Petrochelidon is reduced to a subgenus of *Hirundo*; *Anthus spinoletta pacificus* Todd is mentioned in a footnote, but *A. s. alticola* is omitted; *Lanius excubitor invictus* may not be separable from *L. e. sibiricus*; *Corvus corax clarionensis* is omitted from the list of extralimital races of the species; the Bohemian Waxwing is *Bombycilla garrulus*, not *B. garrula*; the subfamily Regulinae is not recognized as separate from the Sylviinae; the latter group and the Turdinae are considered subfamilies of the Muscicapidae; *Catharus* is used for the three species of "*Hylocichla*" known from the Palearctic; the Aegithalidae and Remizidae are given full family rank (the former would include the Bush-tits and the

latter the Verdin); the Sittinae are treated as a subfamily of the Paridae; *Spinus* (but not *Acanthis*!) is considered a synonym of *Carduelis*; *Acanthis flammea holboelli* is not recognized (considered a doubtful race in the A.O.U. Check-list); the North American rosy finches are considered races of the Old World *Leucosticte arctoa*; and the Emberizidae are given full family rank.

The volume itself is an outstandingly attractive piece of book-making. The typography is particularly handsome, and a light-weight but strong and opaque paper permits this book of almost 800 pages to be handled easily. The binding is perhaps a little flimsy for the amount of use to which many people will put the book, but that has been a shortcoming of many products of English publishers in recent years. The text is remarkably free from typographical errors. There is one *lapsus calami*: on pp. 541 and 542, the species name *familiaris* was inadvertently substituted for *brachydactyla* in the discussion of geographic variation in the Short-toed Tree Creeper.

Dr. Vaurie has made a major contribution to the basic literature of ornithology, and many of us will await with impatience the publication of the second volume.—KENNETH C. PARKES.

THE WATERFOWL OF THE WORLD. By Jean Delacour. Volume Two. The Dabbling Ducks. Country Life Limited, London, 1956: 8 × 10 in., 232 pp., 29 maps and 24 color plates by Peter Scott.

This second volume of Jean Delacour's series continues the attractive and somewhat sumptuous format established by the first, with wide margins, good paper, numerous maps and a generous 24 full-color plates. It covers the dabbling ducks or tribe Anatini and follows, in general, the classification proposed by Delacour and Ernst Mayr in *The Wilson Bulletin* for 1945.

The genus *Anas* is broadly interpreted, including 38 species and 74 retained subspecies, or essentially all the familiar dabbling ducks and their related species in other hemispheres, plus Salvadori's Duck (*A. waigiuiensis*) of New Guinea and the Ringed Teal (*A. leucophrys*) of South America.

In addition, five monospecific genera of doubtful position, or those showing relationship to both dabbling and diving ducks, are included. These are: *Rhodonessa*, the Pink-headed Duck of India; *Malacorhynchus*, the Australian Pink-eared Duck; *Hymenolaimus*, the Mountain Blue Duck of New Zealand; *Stictonetta*, the Freckled Duck of Australia; and *Merganetta*, the Torrent Ducks of South America. This last genus is included on the basis of Niethammer's anatomical studies (1952. *Jour. f. Ornith.*, 93:357-360).

It is indeed fortunate that the author is a "lumper" who sees relationships as more interesting than differences. He may thus save a generation of us interested in waterfowl from the confusion of the "splitters."

It is wonderful to find within the same covers all the most pertinent information on this popular group of birds—not only color plates and distribution maps of every species and subspecies, but significant taxonomic features, basic synonymy, incubation periods, behavior observations, and a very thorough summary of the history of each in captivity. In addition to the essences of the widely scattered literature which Delacour has distilled for us, there is a great deal of new observation drawn from the author's wide experience and from unpublished studies still being pursued by others, such as those of Harry Frith on the Pink-eared and the Freckled Ducks in Australia.

The color plates again show the great artistic skill of Peter Scott. It is his eye for design that permits 12 to 14 ducks to be shown on one plate. Although all are oriented alike to